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ABSTRACT

The semantic change which has occurred in an Austrian community over the past seventy-five years is examined. The study is based on a comparison of an 1897 word list, sound inventory, and phonograph recording with 1973 recordings of sixty informants from four age groups and five socioeconomic strata. In Inmst, the development from an agriculturally-oriented town to an industrial trade center created social and linguistic splits in the community. Three social dialects emerged: full dialect, half dialect, and regional dialect. Half dialect offers the richest source for an examination of semantic change. Semantic change is manifested in semantic splits, pejoration, lexicalization, and obsolescence. These semantic changes occur together with the development of the social dialects and are dependent on the users' attitudes toward them. Thus, semantic variations in the speech community are assigned differing social values that change with time depending on pragmatics and affective variables. Despite the development of the different speech styles, there is a strong tendency to bridge the gaps in order to maximize communication. (PMJ)

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SOME ASPECTS OF SEMANTIC CHANGE IN A SPEECH COMMUNITY

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Why and how does language change? This question has always been of great interest to historical and general linguists. However, it is very seldom that we can observe and document language change in action. Therefore, I would like to share with you some of the findings I have made regarding semantic change that occurred in an Austrian community within the last 75 years.

In 1897 Josef Schatz described the dialect of Imst, a town in Tirol, 60 miles west of Innsbruck. He included detailed word lists showing the sound inventory; in addition, he recorded the dialect in the years 1904 and 1909 on phonograph records (Phonogrammarchiv, Vienna). I was able to use this material for comparison with tape recordings which I made in 1973 (Hathaway, 1976). Sixty informants were chosen from four age groups and five sociological strata. For this time span of 75 years, information about the social, cultural, and industrial development of the town is obtainable from both written documents and personal interviews.

A. Development of Social Dialects

Schatz (1897:V) observed that a homogeneous South Bavarian dialect was spoken by all people in what was then a self-contained agriculturally oriented town of 2400 inhabitants. However, in 1973 Imst counted 6000 inhabitants, and was located on a major railroad line and highway routes, the latter of which brought East-West and North-South traffic. It has also become an industrial and cultural trade center catering to 33,000 tourists each year. Due to the industrial and social changes, people now enter diverse social situations on a daily basis. Three speech styles, or social dialects, namely 'full dialect', 'half dialect', and 'regional dialect' can now be isolated according to phonological and semantic criteria (see table 2).

The analysis and comparison of the homogeneous historical system and the socially motivated present-day systems of the dialect clearly showed the multi-conditioned factors which cause semantic change. Little attention is customarily given to monitoring dialect speech since it is only a spoken language and not a written language. As a result, dialect changes can take place more rapidly under given conditions. In Imst, semantic change occurs together with the development of these social dialects. It is above all conditioned by the attitudes of the speakers toward both their own social dialects and the languages in contact. These attitudes depend on social, political, and cultural influences. Language interacts continuously with the forms of social behavior. Meanings expressed are the concepts or ideas associated in the minds of those who know the language.

The social dialects which have developed in Imst during the past 75 years are each concentrated within certain social and age groups, but are not limited to them. Some generalizations

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can be captured in rules by specifying the social environment in order of importance.

Table 1

full dialect_____ / [_____ ; + native speaker ; + fifty years old and over ; + lower and middle class ; - outside communication]

half dialect_____ / [_____ ; + native speaker ; - fifty years old ; - outside communication ; + lower and middle class]

regional dialect_____ / [_____ ; + upper middle class ; + outside communication ; - native speaker]

Most people have command of two or more speech styles which they shift according to partner, situation, and subject. Style shifting reflects the uniform attitudes held in the community.

Full dialect characterized by archaic vocabulary and pronunciation as described 75 years ago is spoken by people of local origin who are over 50 years of age, most of whom are or were farmers, workers or craftsmen. Their radius of communication is limited to the family, relatives and other townspeople of similar background. Among full dialect speakers, the speaking of full dialect has utmost prestige. According to them, full dialect 'sounds best', 'feels good' and almost anything can be expressed more 'precisely' and 'meaningfully'. The Standard German language does not have the range of vocabulary that is of vital interest to life in Imst. Regional dialect and the German Standard language, on the other hand, are regarded as sounding 'harsh', 'cold', and 'lacking variety of expression and shades of meaning'.

Half dialect provides the richest source for the analysis of semantic change. The archaic forms of the full dialect have taken on either a more specific, a limited, a pejorative, or concrete meaning, while new pronunciations of these words, or loanwords from the German Standard language, have taken on a more general or abstract meaning, as I shall point out later. Half dialect speakers can come from all social classes, as long as their radius of communication is limited. They are usually in the age groups below fifty. Half dialect speakers too are very fond of the Imst dialect, but they object to some of the 'coarse' and 'antiquated' expressions of the full dialect. They also dislike the 'bland' and 'superficial' regional dialect to which they resort only if they cannot be understood otherwise.

In the regional dialect all typical features of the Imst dialect are shed and the general, most dominant South Bavarian dialect features (Kranzmayer, 1956; Keller, 1961, VI, para. 1) are adopted. In the case of some speakers pronunciation features and vocabulary items are substituted from the Standard German language. Regional dialect speakers are mostly teachers, clergymen, factory owners, and people involved in city government. Most typical of these speakers is their wide range of outside communication which forces them to adjust their speech style in order to be understood. They also are regarded as social and linguistic models in the town. Regional dialect speakers usually express regret that they do not have more opportunity to speak dialect which they like very much. They speak very proudly of their many dialect poets.

The German Standard language is only used on stage, in the pulpit, at court and other formal gatherings. It is also used with people who might not understand the regional dialect. Otherwise, the use of the German Standard language in private conversation is considered negatively by all speakers.

The attitudes toward speech styles which are formed by external social, political and cultural developments motivate stylistic and affective (emotive) change. The results can be documented in semantic splits, pejoration, lexicalization and obsolescence.

B. Pragmatics of Style Shifting and the Affective (Emotive) Meaning.

The use of a particular speech style and the shifting from one style to another convey something of the social relationship between speaker and hearer. If the linguistic situation is extended, a particular style can also reflect the personal feelings of the speaker, including his attitude toward the listener, or, his attitude toward something he is talking about. This is the affective meaning (Leech, 1974:18).

A speaker usually adjusts his speech style to that of a partner who stands socially higher, or to that of a person on whom he depends financially. A worker will emulate the speech of his superior because he wants to make concessions to him, he wants to be understood. A farmer's daughter who usually speaks half dialect, and whose parents rent rooms to tourists, will use even 'Standard German' when their annual paying guests and friends arrive from Berlin and Northern Germany. On the other hand, the doctors and lawyers who grew up in Imst speak full dialect, half dialect, or regional dialect, as required to put their patients and clientele at ease and to gain their trust. The judge, who is not dependent on anyone, seldom shifts his speech style in private conversation.

The attitude of a speaker toward another speech style and the social meaning attached to it comes out clearly when he or she imitates or quotes another person. The aim is to set oneself apart from another group in some way, or to ridicule them. A

young farmer's wife, for instance, told a story in her usual half dialect about her mother-in-law, who had been storing antiques in her attic which the young woman hoped some day to acquire. On an errand in the attic, the young woman noticed that quite a few of the antiques were gone. When she asked her mother-in-law where the antiques were, she answered: "I have sold them." In quoting the mother-in-law, the woman shifted her style from half dialect into regional dialect: [diphɔbi feRk'aft] 'die habe ich verkauft' instead of the full or half dialect correspondence [diphɔnifeRkχouft] which would be the customary speech style of both women. And, while quoting her mother-in-law, the young woman assumed a gesture and intonation of arrogance. By shifting the speech style, the young woman really wanted to imply: My mother-in-law is very superficial and arrogant, she has no appreciation for tradition and old things. She is just like those 'outsiders' whose language and behavior she imitated. Likewise, if a younger person wishes to portray another person as backward, crude, or ignorant of modern terminology, he quotes him or her in full dialect speech style. I observed that little girls whose parents spoke full or half dialect talked to their dolls in German Standard. They were trying to imitate tourist families who seemed very exotic to them. Boys, however, preferred half dialect in their games. They did not want to appear 'sissy' or 'put on airs'.

The use of full dialect has some magic and emotional quality felt by every adult resident of Imst in all social groups. It is a feeling of social solidarity, well being, security, and 'the good old times'. When Imsters have a glass of beer together in the local 'Gasthaus', all social gaps disappear when everyone speaks dialect. Also, in dialect the formal forms of address do not exist. However, an air of tension, mistrust and coldness can be felt as long as one of the people employs regional dialect or even the German Standard language, as a factory owner once told me. Every three years an old heathen festival is re-enacted. The spirits of winter fight the spirits of spring. The rituals are orally transmitted from the elders of the town and great care is taken in preserving the tradition, according to which the chants in full dialect must especially not be altered. In these chants the archaic dialect has become almost a sacred language. Dialect poets who are most successful make use of this emotional aspect in writing poetry by choosing most archaic forms, subjects and events from the 'good old times'. Thus, the speech community of Imst is characterized by strong linguistic traditions which aim to keep full dialect alive. Yet, the influence of the tourist industry which actually provides 60% of the town's income forces other speech styles on the inhabitants. The attitudes toward speech styles on a social basis and the associated meaning/implications in stylistic change show further results in the lexicon.

C. Resulting Semantic Changes

Semantic change is tied to the synchronic linguistic variation of the speech styles. In some speech styles certain semantic fields (or domains) change more readily than in others. In the full dialect of Imst semantic distinctions are made in the domains of nature, eating, drinking and working, in a vocabulary that does not exist in the German Standard language. These domains reflect in their vocabulary the culturally important distinctions. The positive attitudes toward these semantic fields have protected them from change, and substitution, but they are subject to obsolescence in the younger generation (compare table 2).

Full dialect has many words for saying 'it is getting dark' [ɛs naχtələt, ɛs gRa:βələt] with diminutive l-suffix to express the gradual, little by little process of getting dark. [maltsp, munkp, kχuip] are forms of chewing, and [luRgp, sipfəlp] forms of drinking. The semantic field of 'working' is especially large [mɛadəRp] 'to work hard', [gɸkəlp] 'to work aimlessly', [glaklp] 'to work sloppily' and [netəlp] 'to work playfully', and so on, all words which do not exist in the Standard German language. Full dialect correspondences in the semantic field of relatives and animals take on a pejorative meaning. For instance, even the oldest grandparents in Imst refused to be called [nã:lə] 'grandmother' and [nẽinp] 'grandfather', because they did not consider themselves that 'old fashioned' and 'incoherent'. In the minds of the people in Imst, the meaning of 'toothless' and 'walking with a cane' is implied by those terms. Thus, the terms which had survived until recently do not apply any more to modern medically-well-cared-for senior citizens. The new words 'Grossvater' and 'Grossmutter' are loanwords from the German Standard language where they were already borrowed from the French in early modern times. Full dialect correspondences for animals like [fakχlsaiəR] 'mother pigs' and [gi:lp] 'female goat' have a vulgar meaning and are now replaced with expressions from the German Standard [muədəRsaiəR] and [gɔpɐs], although the pronunciation remains in dialect. Animals are groomed and housed better than ever before and seem to have risen in status.

A semantic split occurred in all feminine nouns ending in '-er' and '-el'. The full dialect forms with the suffix -Rp and -lp assume a pejorative meaning in terms of 'old, run down, messy', while the standard pronunciation denotes the regular object, i.e. [kχɔməRp] is an old room in which junk is stored, [ʃauflp] is an old rusty, bent shovel. This pejoration is also recognized now by full dialect speakers. Another semantic split occurs regularly in lengthening of the vowel in full dialect in comparison with shortening of the vowel typical of standard pronunciation. The full dialect pronunciation has a specific or concrete meaning; the standard pronunciation, a general or abstract meaning. For example, [baiχl̥] is a butcher's hatchet, while [bail] is a hatchet in general. Also, [ʃli:f] is polish on metal, but [ʃlif] is polish in manners or work. The use of both forms

is especially typical of half dialect, and only a few double forms have survived in regional dialect. Historically, many dialect forms with specific meaning have also entered the Standard language, e.g. German 'drucken' to print in comparison to 'drücken' to press (Dornseiff, 1955:69). Examples in English are Scandinavian borrowings of 'skirt' in comparison to 'shirt' and 'yard' in comparison to 'garden' (Anttila, 1972, para. 8.12).

Many full dialect correspondences have been lexicalized, e.g. [luiksǫ] 'Leuchse' which is a part of a wooden cart. Of course, with modern technology expressions for old fashioned tools become obsolete with the object itself. Lexicalization with additional folk etymology is most common in names for mountains and fields, e.g. 'Larsenn' the name for a mountainous region is associated with 'Leere Senne' which means 'empty Alpine dairy farm'. But, for the true etymology we must go back to Roman times when this area was settled. The name is derived from Romance dialect forms of larzon > laricione with the meaning 'larch hill' (Finsterwalder, 1954:103).

D. Summary

Thus, semantic change in a speech community occurs together with the development of social dialects and is dependent on the users' attitudes toward them. In this way, semantic variations in the speech community are assigned differing social values which change with time. Language exists for and is maintained by the speech community. It reflects the culture of the community. Therefore, semantic change must be analyzed using data in context from the speech community. The causes of change are to be found in a complicated network of social, psychological, phonological, and grammatical factors.

In Imst, the sudden development from an agriculturally oriented town to an industrial and cultural trade center, located on major traffic routes, created social and linguistic splits in the speech community. Yet, since language aims toward maximum communication, a strong tendency to bridge these gaps can be observed in the adjustment of speech styles according to partner, situation and subject. In half dialect those semantic changes which are due to the change in generation and due to social developments are most evident in the many double forms. But, there is also a tendency toward the levelling of forms and speech styles, since more and more people are extending their radius of communication. The direction of levelling is, therefore, going more toward the regional dialect and the German Standard language, despite strong traditions which tend to keep full dialect alive.

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Table 2

Semantic and Phonological Criteria which Separate the Speech Styles

Full Dialect	Half Dialect	Regional Dialect	Written Standard	English
a) Full dialect correspondence has a positive meaning (but subject to obsolescence)				
naχtələt, gRa:βəɻət			es dämmert	it is getting dark
maltsɐ, muŋkɐ, kχuiɐ			kauen	chew (with tongue; slowly)
luRgɐ, sipfəlɐ			trinken	drink (fast; slowly)
mɛadəRɐ, gɸkəlɐ			arbeiten	work (hard; aimlessly)
glaklɐ, netəlɐ			arbeiten	work (sloppily;playfully)
b) Full dialect correspondence has negative meaning (pejoration)				
nɑ̃:lə	gRɔasmuədəR, o:ma		Grossmutter, Oma	grandmother
nɛ̃inə	gRɔasfɔdəR, o:pa		Grossvater, Opa	grandfather
fakχlsaiəR	muədəRsaiəR	mutəRsauən	Mutterschweine	mother pigs
ʃauflɐ	ʃauflɐ - ʃaufl̥		Schaufel	shovel (old,rusty,bent)
kχɔməRɐ	kχɔməRɐ - kχɔməR		Kammer	room (old, with junk)
c) Full dialect correspondence has a specific or concrete meaning (semantic split)				
baiχl̥	baiχl̥ - bail	bail	Beil(des Metzgers)	hatchet (the butcher's)
ʃli:f	ʃli:f - ʃlif	ʃlif	Schliff	polish (on metal; in manners)
d) Full dialect correspondence is lexicalized				
laRsen	laRsen	laRsen	Larsenn (leere Senne)	larch hill
luiksɐ	luiksɐ	luiksɐ	Leuchse	part on wooden cart